

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4904

February 22, 2006

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rice:

In a development we are certain you and your colleagues have been watching closely, it was reported recently that the avian influenza (H5N1) virus has been detected for the first time in Nigeria. International health officials have long warned about the potential danger of avian flu spreading to the African continent, and it is apparent that this danger has now become a reality.

While the threat of avian influenza is critical for all of us, it is of particular concern in Africa. As you know, many governments in Africa are simply unequipped to effectively deal with an outbreak, which requires early detection, quarantining, and culling of affected bird populations. And although there are no reports yet of humans contracting the disease in Nigeria, recent cases in Turkey and Iraq underscore the danger for people who live in close proximity to poultry, as is the case throughout much of Africa. In areas where birds, livestock, and people are in close contact, the risk of the virus mutating into a strain that can be transmitted between humans is increased. Additionally, immunocompromised individuals may be more susceptible to the disease, and it is unclear what effect avian influenza could have on populations already ravaged by HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases. Finally, the already overburdened or underdeveloped health infrastructure in much of Africa may find itself unable to cope with a pandemic.

It is clear that this is an international issue that no country in the world is immune from. Much attention has been paid to the problem in Asia, but we are concerned that the international community has not prepared sufficiently for an outbreak in Africa. Particularly troublesome is the amount of time it apparently took for the outbreak in Nigeria—a member of the recently formed West African Network on Avian Influenza, and presumably better prepared than many other African nations to deal with the threat of avian influenza—to be reported to international health authorities. An outbreak in neighboring Niger, considered one of the poorest countries in the world, could spread rapidly without report because of inadequate surveillance.

While we know you understand well the impact an outbreak of avian flu could have throughout Africa, we want to make sure our government is prepared to respond quickly and effectively to this threat. We write to request information on the following:

- Your plan for managing a wide-scale outbreak of avian influenza in Africa, as well as the development of contingency plans relating to the impact that an outbreak of avian influenza may have diplomatically, economically, and security-wise in each major region of the continent;
- The extent to which your Bureau of African Affairs is coordinating with the efforts of the U.S. Agency for International Development, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Homeland Security, and other appropriate agencies to develop assistance programs and technical support for countries potentially affected by this outbreak;
- The State Department's efforts and plans to support organizations like the African Union to develop information-sharing mechanisms and clearinghouses of information related to initial reporting, initial impact, mitigation efforts, and management mechanisms to prevent the spread of the virus, beyond the initial efforts that have been made through the International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza; and
- Whether or not the State Department has identified particularly vulnerable regions or countries, with a detailed account of the ways you are supporting or intend to support efforts in these regions or countries through both bilateral and multilateral mechanisms to help mitigate or alleviate the impact avian flu may have on these places. We are particularly interested in learning how the \$334 million pledged in Beijing in January will be distributed.

We need to work together to assist the countries of Africa in preventing more widespread transmission of the deadly H5N1 virus, and we look forward to hearing your response on this extremely critical issue.

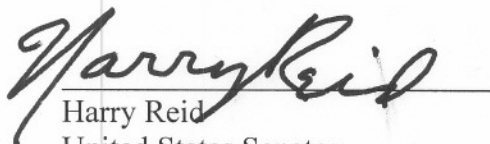
Sincerely,



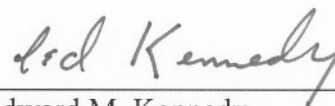
Russell D. Feingold
United States Senator



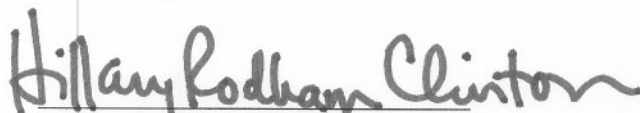
Sam Brownback
United States Senator



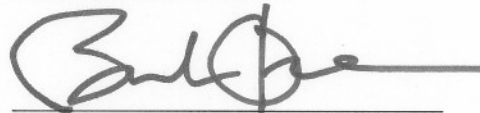
Harry Reid
United States Senator



Edward M. Kennedy
United States Senator



Hillary R. Clinton
United States Senator



Barack Obama
United States Senator